

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST 60

AUGUST 1981



FLOWERS OF THE CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT

by Rita Mills

SPIRIDIDIUM PARVIFOLIUM

(Dusty Miller)

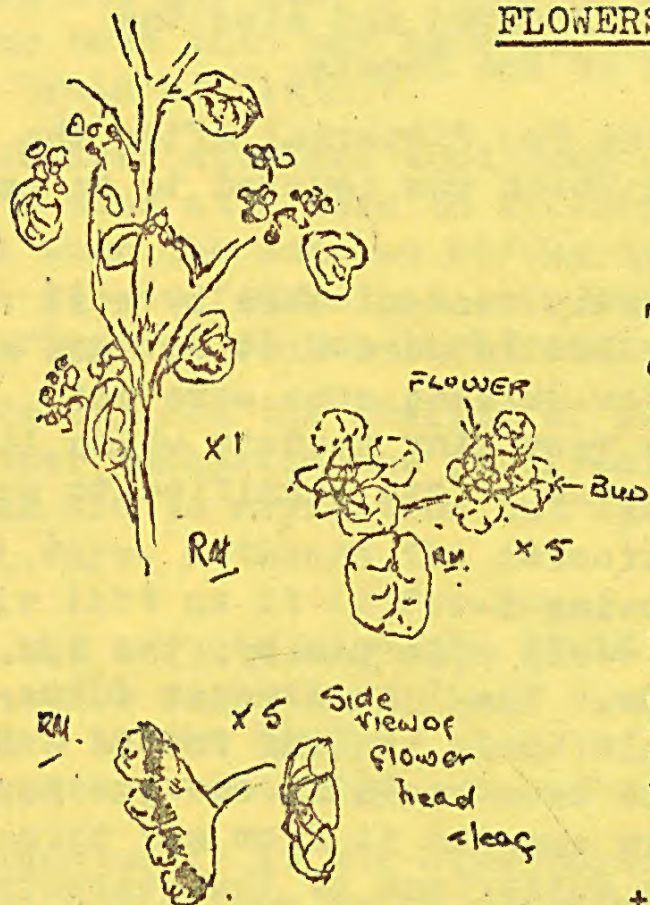
(Flowering - late Winter to early Spring)

This plant does not seem to be very common around Castlemaine, although there are many new plants where the fire went through just South of the pine plantation at Castlemaine North.

Unlike the mature plants, these seedlings are bright shining green. The leaves are oval or heart shaped and crinkled like the mature leaves, but lack the dusting of fine white hairs which gives the plant its common name.

The tiny white flowers are in loose terminal clusters. They are also, like the stems and leaves, covered with a white down. A hand lens is needed to really appreciate these dainty flowers.

The flowerheads are accompanied by small brown bracts.



President :	Mr G. Sitch	Ph 72 2734
Secretary :	Mrs M. Lindsay	72 2720
Treasurer :	Mr F. Meyer	72 1958
Newsletter:	Mr G. Broadway	72 2513

The World of Spiders

A talk given to the club by Mr Harry Barclay of the Creswick FNC.

Mr Perkins introduced Mr Barclay, who spoke on the fascination and beauty of the world of Arachnids (spiders). Unfortunately Mr Barclay had to rely on borrowed slides as he had had the misfortune to lose 2 cassettes of his own slides representing about 30 years of work.

Mr Barclay noted that the spider was a much maligned species and appeared in political satires, nursery rhymes and characters. Mythology tells the story of a young lady who was a spinner and weaver and somehow invoked the wrath of a particular Goddess, who cast a spell and transformed the young lady into a spider.

The difference between insects and spiders was clarified and the anatomy of spiders explained with the use of a very clear diagram. It was seen that there were two distinct sections - the thorax and the abdomen. Reproduction was briefly discussed and also the cannibalistic and aggressive tendencies of the female.

Use is made of tall grass and the wind for dispersal after the hatching. A slide was shown of an area which was covered to an extraordinary density with spider web.

Many of the spiders shown were instantly recognizable by most members as local species, others were a little more exotic, such as the large bird eating spider found in New Guinea; some were not unrecognizable simply because they were very tiny spiders which live in leaves and flowers and had not been seen before magnified to such a degree.

The spiders shown included the following :-

The Red-back Spider which belongs to a world wide family, the N.Z. species having spots instead of a stripe. They cause great suffering with their bite - inducing severe muscular pain lasting from 4 - 6 weeks. They have great potency and have been known in one particular instance to kill a 14" Tiger snake, then suspend it from six threads and extract the body juices. Dr Struan Sutherland of the Melbourne immunology department has managed to produce an antivenene but more work remains to be done. They are considered to be on the decline as many breeding places have been removed, they favour dampness and rubbish.

Huntsman Spider : the web is spun by the male who then deposits his sperm on it. He is eaten by the female.

Golden Orb Spider : with a very sticky web capable of holding small birds, lizards, grasshoppers, etc. The web of the N.G. species has been used for making masks for the suffocation of enemies. They lay 200 - 300 eggs and hang head down in their webs.

Bird Dropping Spider : or Deaths Head Spider. Lives in fruit trees has no web and so it catches its food with its legs. Lives on Moths

which it attracts by issuing a scent similar to that emitted by the female moth.

The Gliding Spider : is very small (ca 1 cm) and has membranes between the legs, it can jump 17 cm and trails a life-line.

Net Casters: they build a web or net between the front legs and hang on by their back legs.

Animal Magnetism

One of the intriguing mysteries of pigeons and bees has been their ability to find their way home from a distant point. Man has for many years used the homing ability of pigeons, but has long puzzled over how the bird managed to do it.

Research work has shown that migrating birds use the stars as a guide, even being able to identify quite minute areas of sky on an overcast night. However one mystery which remains is how a bird knows its way over a route of perhaps thousands of miles when it has never been that way before. Does it have a star memory "built in" to its brain at birth ?

Workers surmised that bees could navigate using the sun, but were for a time at a loss to explain how bees could find their way quite well when the sun was hidden by clouds. This mystery was explained when it was found that bees were capable of detecting the plane of polarization of sun light coming through the clouds.

To explain the ability of pigeons however, workers felt that a further mechanism was involved. The birds can certainly use the sun as an aid to navigation but again are able to 'home' quite well on dull days, although the detection of light polarisation is not on their list as it is for bees. Scientists tested whether they could use the earth's magnetic field as a guide by releasing pigeons which had small magnets or field producing electric coils around their heads. As the birds' sense of direction was completely disrupted it was apparent that some part of the bird's anatomy must be magnetic.

Eventually it was discovered that there was a very small crystal of magnetic iron oxide weighing about on ten millionth of a gram situated between the eye and the brain, which was discovered first of all by X-ray techniques. A similar built-in compass was also discovered in the abdomen of the honey-bee, and also strangely enough in certain forms of bacteria which live in lake mud. This raises another mystery, namely, why would an organism which lives in the mud on the bottom of a lake, want to find its way home ?

One is tempted to think how splendid it would be if the leaders of Field Nat. expeditions were also to be so equipped. Perhaps there is some scope for some genetic engineering here.

WVENCA Campout & Annual Meeting at Donald

October 17 - 18 1981

Program

Saturday October 17

- 1.00 p.m. Assemble in Donald High School, entering from the Donald-Marnoo road.
- 1.30 Excursion to Mt Jeffcott by bus. Cost \$2 per head.
No time for afternoon tea, so bring fruit or similar.
- 4.30 Return to Donald
- 5.00 Tea: Bring own food to the Home Eco. room at the High School. Tea and coffee will be provided by the Host club.
- 6.30 Official Welcome and Annual General Meeting of WVENCA
- 8.00 15 minute break
- 8.15 Guest speaker; Mr Ian Maroske, Principal of Horsham High School and trustee of Wyperfeld National Park
- 9.30 Supper, provided by the Donald Club.

Sunday, October 18

- 9.30 a.m. Excursion to Salt Lakes, by private cars. Stops at Lake Grassy to view bird life and at the Twin Trees. Total distance - about 65 km.
- 1.00 p.m. Lunch - at Lake Batyo Catyo. After lunch a time for a leisurely ramble.
- 2.30 Wimmera/Mallee Channel system. Then proceed to Guthrie's Weir
- 3.30 Afternoon tea at Guthrie's Weir
- 4.00 Depart.

THE WELLSFORD FOREST

Geology : The area consists of thinly bedded shales, slates and sandstones of Ordovician age, similar in fact to the Castlemaine area.

Physiography : The main features are gentle ridges.

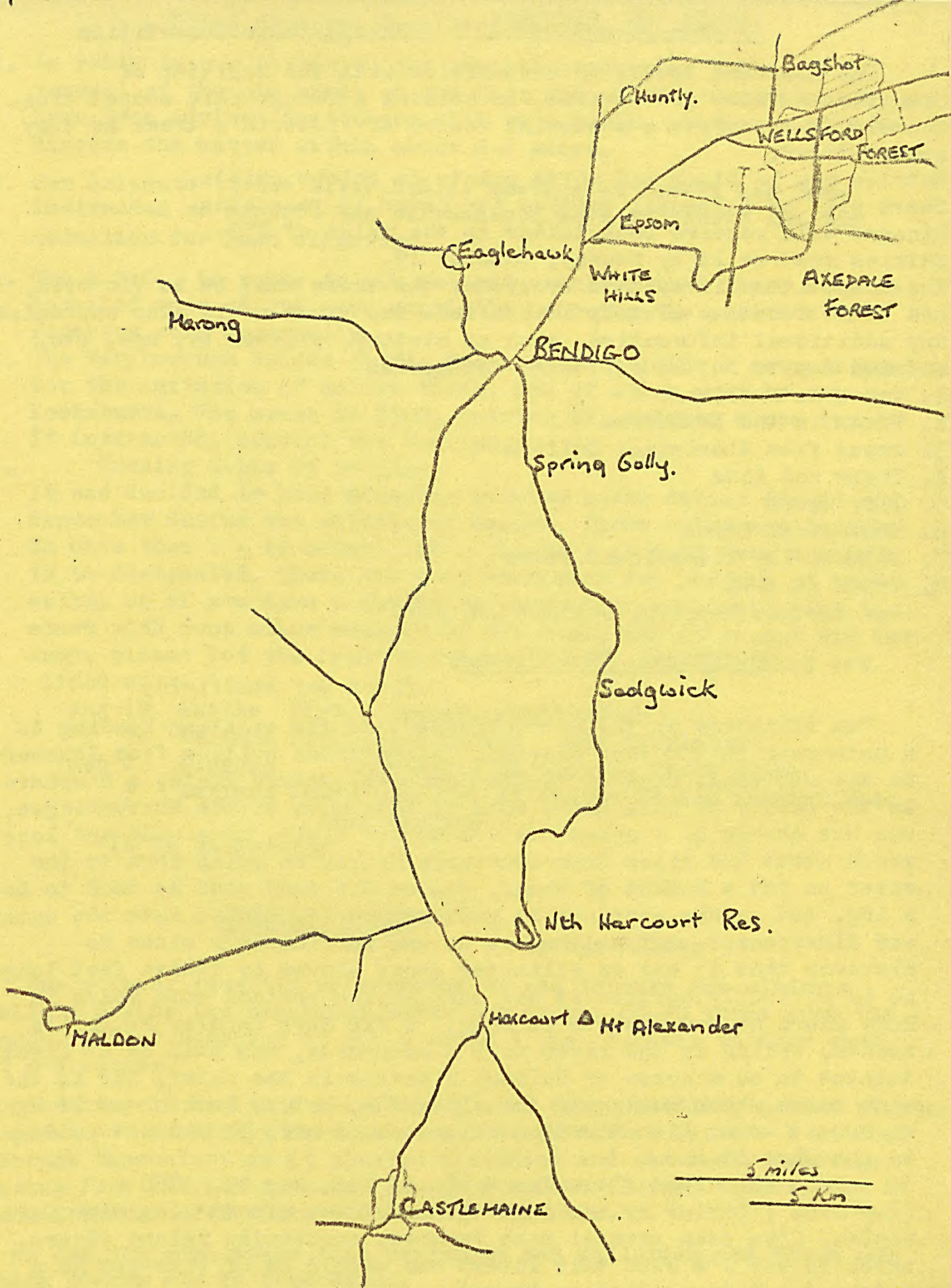
Elevation: Between 150 and 225 metres.

Rainfall: 500 mm per annum, as compared to Castlemaine 554 mm.

Tourist attractions : Very little, only a tourist road which traverses the area.

Vegetation : Mainly Red Ironbark, Grey Box and Yellow Gum as the dominant eucalypts.

Understory species include :- Wattles - Rough, Golden and Gold-dust. Crowea, Leafless Currant Bush, Flat Pea, Bush Pea, Westringia, Wheat-grass, Blown Grass, Silvery Hair Grass, Rayless Daisy, Billy-buttons, Gorse Bitter-Pea, Cut-leaf Goodenia, Tiny Star, Toad Rush, Mat rush, Yam Daisy, Soft Millotia, Kangaroo Grass, Twining Fringe Lily, Dwarf Arrowgrass, Goldfields Grevillea, Daphne Heath.



The National Trust, in conjunction with the Register of Significant Trees of Victoria, is holding a photographic competition. The aim is to create a pictorial record of Victoria's trees as they appear today.

Entries may be black and white prints or colour prints.

There will be a special section for under 15 year olds.

Winners will receive book tokens to the value of \$50.

Entries must be in by Monday, October 19.

The competition is open to everyone, the trees must be in Victoria, and their location clearly identified. The trust would also appreciate any additional information, such as history, planted by, age, etc.

Entries may be in the following categories

1. Trees as Dwellings
2. Trees in the Landscape
3. Trees from Aboriginal Culture
4. Trees and Kids
5. City Trees
6. Historical Trees
7. Botanically Significant Trees
8. Trees at Work

For further details, contact Hon Sec.

Happenings Now History

(from Ray Bradfield)

"An Alligator in the Murrumbidgee", is the exciting heading to a paragraph in the Yass Courier. A gentleman writing from Yeumburra on the 8th inst. says :- "A few days ago, George Boate, a shepherd in the employ of Chas Hall, esq. of Yeumburra on the Murrumbidgee, who has charge of a sheep station up the river, on a wide and long reach about two miles from Yeumburra House, on going down to the river to get a bucket of water, saw on the sand what he took to be a log, but on his approach it suddenly moved, backed into the water and disappeared, but not before he was sufficiently close to discover that it was an alligator about eleven or twelve feet long. he is perfectly certain it was one, having resided some years in India where he saw numbers of them. A few days before, Mr Hall's nephew, riding up the river with a companion, saw what he at first thought to be a horse or bullock floating in the water, and in the same reach where Boate saw the alligator, but on looking at it again he saw it move; his attention being called off, he did not go down to see what it was.

From the Mount Alexander Mail of Wed. Aug 19, 1868
(Ray adds ; During my readings through these old Mt Alexander Mail copies, I've seen several such reports, concerning inland rivers. which is why I'm sure this latest one should be of interest to a modern-day Natural History Group)

Notes from the Committee Meeting of July 23

1. In reply to our letter to the council concerning the rumored removal of the elm trees on the East side of the Camp Reserve, we have been advised that there will be a public meeting called to discuss the matter within about 4-6 weeks.
2. Our delegate to the W.V.F.N.C.A. meeting at Bambera has been instructed to support the Warrnambool move to remove the tax deduction for land clearing.
3. The L.C.C., in reply to our request, replied that there were no detailed maps of the area available, showing the position of reserves more accurately.
4. The Maryborough Golden Wattle Festival is holding a competition for the imitation of native birds, one of which must be the Kookaburra. The prize is \$500, entries \$2, entries close Aug 3. If interested, contact the Hon Sec.
5. Evening Walks in Spring:
It was decided to hold Wednesday evening walks during August and September during the wildflower season. These walks are to take no more than 1 - 1½ hours, and will start at 4.15 from a point to be designated. There are some vacancies for leaders of such walks, so if you have a favourite tour which you would like to share with some other members of the club, and it is not too far away, please let the President know. So far the following are lined up :-
Aug 19 Wattle Flat, Leader, Geoff Sitch
26 Kalimna Park, High School Bev Singleton
Sep 2 Vaughan Campbell's Ck School. Frank Blake
9 Kalimna Anticline; Cnr of Hunter St and Tourist Road,
Ern Perkins
16 To be decided

WALLABY TUCKER

by Wyn Palmer

One morning recently we happened to see through the window a wallaby having its breakfast under our trees, 20-30 yards from the house. After watching it for a while I was curious to know what it was eating.

Thinking it might be demolishing some of my seedling native plants - grown and carefully nurtured over the past five years - I watched through binoculars as it plucked something and sat back, daintily eating from its front paws. It was a yellow-fleshed fungus, one of many growing around the block since the rain.

We had not been aware that kangaroos and wallabies ate these and think others may be interested.

CLUB CALENDAR

Friday, August 14

Meeting : Film night.

Saturday, Aug, 15.

Outing : The Wellsford Forest. Leader is Mr F. Blake. Distance is about 55 km. Depart from Foundry Band Room car park at 10 a.m.

A BBQ lunch has been suggested.

Friday, Sept. 11

Meeting: Subject "Beekeeping"

Speaker; Mr R. Goodman

Sunday, Sept. 13

Outing, The Muckleford Forest, to be held in association with the Maryborough F.N.C.

Meet at Ed. Centre at 1.45 or at the Gowar School at 2.

Monday, Sept. 21

Outing: The annual Show-day holiday long hike.

This year, we depart from the High School, walk through the Moonlight Flat pine forest to Lawson's Lookout. Lunch at the Expedition Pass reservoir, then home by a more southerly route.

Friday, Oct 9

Meeting : Subject, "The Rutaceae"

Speaker, Mr P. Ellis of Bendigo F.N.C.

Saturday, Oct 10

Outing: Taradale

Friday, November 13

Meeting. Subject, "The birds of Mosquito Flat"

Speaker, Dr F. Harrap of Ballarat F.N.C.

Can specimens of the Greater Glider be moved to another area of forest when their home trees are felled ?

Scientists from the Australian National University found that when this was attempted, the animals preferred to stay home rather than move to nearby unfelled forest. Most starved within a week.

General meetings are held on the second Friday of the month at 8 p.m. in the Education Centre, Castlemaine.

Outings usually take place on the following Saturday, leaving the Ed. Centre at 1.30, after organising people into cars, etc.

Business meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month, at 8 p.m. in the Castlemaine Education Centre, Mostyn Street.

Any alterations in the above arrangements will be notified.

Members of the public and intending members are cordially invited to attend meetings or outings.